

Guiding Tips for Planning and Implementing a Successful Dropout Prevention Program

by

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The National Dropout Prevention Center (NDPC) has focused on the dropout issue since 1986 and has provided leadership, technical assistance, and evaluation services to state agencies, local schools, and community organizations that provide intervention programs to high-risk youth. Throughout these experiences, NDPC has studied policies, identified model programs, developed intervention strategies, and refined proven practices. NDPC has become one of the leading organizations to invest in developing and delivering research-based solutions for school practitioners and community leaders across the nation.

Planning and developing dropout prevention programs is not easy. Each targeted and schoolwide intervention must be tailored and implemented differently in each school and community. However, there is a pattern of effective strategies and proven practices that is evident in successful schools. These best practices are captured in the practical guiding tips that NDPC has consistently provided to school and community leaders charged with addressing the critical dropout issue. These ***Guiding Tips for Planning and Implementing a Successful Dropout Prevention Program*** are grounded in this philosophy: “Start Early and Never Give Up!”

Situation

One of every four entering ninth grade students will not graduate with a high school diploma.

Although we may not know the exact number of dropouts that occur each year in every school or the precise rate of dropouts in a particular state or in the nation, there is sufficient research-based evidence that the issue is real. The approximate national dropout rate of 25% is deserving of attention by every school and community leader. It is critical that each school and community know their own dropout rate because it varies greatly with these rates being well over 50% in many urban settings across the nation.

We Know Enough

Imagine every ninth grade student graduating on time with a high school diploma!

The good news is that there is sufficient evidence-based research about the dropout issue and the specific risk factors that either push or pull students out of the formal schooling process. It is clear that these include individual, family, school, and community risk factors; collectively, they offer a perspective about the critical and comprehensive nature of why struggling students leave school. With this important information about the dropout issue, it then becomes possible to develop effective early warning systems and action plans to help every student graduate on time.

Effective Strategies and Solutions

Sufficient knowledge about the issue and proven practices are readily available to make a difference.

The continued good news is that the research base continues to grow about effective school reform initiatives and successful dropout prevention and reentry programs. Although the interacting family, school, or community factors affecting each and every student offer many challenges, it is clear that sufficient program knowledge is available to provide guidance to program planners to develop policies, strategies, and model dropout prevention programs useful to decision makers at all levels—national, state, and local.

Commitment to Action

What must we do as a nation; as a state; as a local school, community, or business leader; or as a parent?

Even better is the news that there are growing numbers of state-level lawmakers and local school administrators making the dropout issue a very high priority, and providing the appropriate level of resources and commitments to sustain a successful and measurable outcome for increasing the high school graduation rate. These actions provide opportunities for proven solutions and effective strategies to address the critical issues associated with the multidimensional conditions faced by struggling students each and every day of their lives.

Many implementation strategies have been derived from experiences with effective programs, and these ideas form a solid base for comprehensive program planning at the local school and community levels or with the families of struggling students. Therefore, it becomes the responsibility of all stakeholders to accept the challenge and work toward an expectation that every entering first grade student will proceed through school and graduate with a diploma. The Guiding Tips are research-based, offering an excellent framework and starting point towards the goal of a 100% graduation rate.

Guiding Tips—Start Early and Never Give Up!

The Guiding Tips were derived from a review of the research related to dropout prevention issues combined with the vast practical experiences gained by NDPC while providing technical assistance to schools engaged in program interventions. The Tips could serve as a checklist to program planners to determine the breadth and depth of the existing comprehensive programs in a school, district, or community.

1. Start before the child starts school.
2. Engage parents early and continuously.
3. Enforce reading skills, especially in grades 1-3.
4. Make every transition period for students a success.
5. Support a safe and positive learning climate for students.
6. Create an individual graduation plan for 8th-grade students.
7. Secure community support to embrace the value of education.
8. Encourage experiential learning with active teaching in all classrooms.
9. Enlarge the learning time with expanded opportunities for every student.
10. Utilize technology to manage and encourage basic learning and enrichment.
11. Provide students career exploration opportunities and expectations for success.
12. Never give up on a single student or the commitment to help every student to graduate.

For more information about effective strategies to increase the graduation rate, model dropout prevention programs, and other school improvement resources, go to our Web site, www.dropoutprevention.org.



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